



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH HAZARD ASSESSMENT

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OEHHA Releases Draft Health Goal for Arsenic in Drinking Water

SACRAMENTO – The California Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) today released a draft Public Health Goal (PHG) for arsenic in drinking water.

The draft PHG proposes to identify 4 parts per trillion as a level of arsenic in drinking water that would not be expected to pose a human health risk.

In developing the draft PHG, OEHHA conducted an exhaustive analysis of all available scientific studies on the health effects of arsenic. The proposed PHG of 4 parts per trillion is based upon studies of hundreds of thousands of patients in Taiwan, Chile and Argentina with lung and bladder cancers associated with elevated levels of arsenic in drinking water. OEHHA estimates that a level of 4 parts per trillion of arsenic in drinking water would cause not more than one additional cancer case in a population of one million people drinking two liters of water daily for 70 years.

"Arsenic is a naturally occurring element, but it is also one of the most toxic substances commonly found in drinking water," OEHHA Director Dr. Joan E. Denton said. "Our public health goal, when adopted, will establish a long-term objective for the reduction of arsenic in California's drinking water."

State law requires OEHHA to develop PHGs for all regulated drinking water contaminants. A PHG is not a regulatory drinking water standard, and it is not a boundary between "safe" and "dangerous" levels of a chemical in drinking water. A PHG represents a health-protective level of a chemical in drinking water that can serve as a long-term goal for California's drinking water providers and regulators. Once the arsenic PHG is finalized, the Department of Health Services (DHS) will develop a new state drinking-water standard for arsenic that, by law, must be as close to the PHG as is economically and technically feasible.

A copy of the draft arsenic PHG document can be viewed or downloaded from OEHHA's Web site, www.oehha.ca.gov. OEHHA will hold a public workshop to accept public comments on the draft document on May 2, 2003 at 10 a.m. in the first-floor auditorium at 1515 Clay Street, Oakland. OEHHA will

also accept written comments on the draft document until May 2, 2003. Comments can be mailed to OEHHA's Pesticide and Environmental Toxicology Section, 1515 Clay Street, 16th floor, Oakland, CA 94612.

Arsenic is found naturally in air, water, soil, mineral deposits, and food. While arsenic in water typically is naturally occurring, the improper disposal of waste chemicals can also contaminate water supplies with arsenic. Long-term exposure to arsenic in drinking water can increase the risk of lung and bladder cancer and, to a lesser extent, increase the risk of skin, liver and kidney cancer. Other serious health effects stemming from long-term ingestion of arsenic in drinking water include heart attacks, stroke, diabetes mellitus, high blood pressure, liver and nerve damage, abnormal skin growths, and some reproductive and developmental problems.

The existing state and federal drinking water standards for arsenic have been set at 50 parts per billion for many years. A new federal arsenic standard of 10 parts per billion will take effect in 2006. States may adopt a new standard that is equal to or more stringent than the federal standard. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has established a long-term Maximum Contaminant Level Goal (the federal counterpart to OEHHA's PHG) of no arsenic in drinking water.

A legislative bill authored by Senator Don Perata and enacted into law in 2001 specifically requires OEHHA to develop a PHG for arsenic. The same bill also requires DHS to revise its drinking water standard for arsenic after the PHG is finalized.

The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment is one of six entities within the California Environmental Protection Agency. OEHHA's mission is to protect and enhance public health and the environment by objective scientific evaluation of risks posed by hazardous substances.

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The energy challenge facing California is real. Every Californian needs to take immediate action to reduce energy consumption. For a list of simple ways you can reduce demand and cut your energy costs, see California's official "Flex Your Power" Web site at www.flexyourpower.ca.gov.